NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE MYSTERY OF THE MIKADO

OR

NICK CARTER IN JAPAN

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

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THE MYSTERY OF THE MIKADO;

OR,

Nick Carter in Japan.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE SECRET HIGHWAY TO THE PALACE.

"Will you tell me the time, sir?"

Nick Carter looked at his watch and replied, shortly:

"Half-past three."

"We will be exactly on time," said Ten-Ichi.

"That is as it should be. How much farther have we to go?"

"About an English mile; no more."

"This is rather an unusual enterprise you have induced me to enlist upon, Ten-Ichi."

"You will have no cause to regret it, sir, and in consenting to come here as you have done, with no further assurances than I was able to give you, you have done an act of kindness which will be much more far-reaching than you can realize, until you know all."

"I have come here, Ten-Ichi, simply as a favor to you; nothing more. You deserved some return from me, for you have proven yourself faithful and efficient. More than that, Ten-Ichi, you are a good lad and you have made me very fond of you."

"I thank you for that expression, my chief."

"Are you sure that the emperor will be awaiting us?"

"I am positive."

"And yet you made this engagement with him more than a year ago."

"I did."

"And agreed to meet him with punctuality, at a certain place at a fixed time, and to present me to him. It strikes me, Ten-Ichi, that you had wonderful confidence in my willingness to come to Japan."

"My emperor demanded it of me. It was an order, not a request."

"And if you had failed? If I had not consented to come?"

"My life would have been forfeited."

"You did not tell me that when you asked me to accompany you to Japan, and I hesitated."

"No."

"Perhaps I might not have hesitated had I known that your life hung in the balance."

"I would not stoop to bring you here on such a plea as that," said Ten-Ichi, simply.

"You are a brave lad. I am glad I consented to come."

"You will be still more pleased when you have met my emperor."

"Tell me about your Mikado, Ten-Ichi. What sort of man is he?"

"A great and a good man."

"Naturally, since he is the Mikado," responded Nick, with a touch of satire.

"I refer to him personally, not officially," was the calm reply.

"Pardon me, my lad; you love your emperor."

"I adore him, sir, and I am still speaking personally. Every good citizen of Japan loves the Mikado because it is the inheritance of every Japanese to love his emperor; but I speak without regard to his title or estate, and without reference to his official dignity. I love the emperor, but I adore the Man."

"Well said, Ten-Ichi."

Nick Carter and his assistant were seated in a small, punt-like boat which the latter was paddling, and they were making their way slowly between a double row of overhanging foliage which came together over their heads, so that it formed a perfect canopy above them. This, of itself, would have effectually screened them from observation, even in the daytime when the sun was shining, but as the hour was half-past three in the morning and there was only starlight in the heavens, there was small chance of their being seen as they glided silently along the water course, which was so narrow that Nick, from his seat in the stern of the boat, might at frequent intervals have touched with ease either bank of the miniature canal.

Twenty-four hours had elapsed since they landed on the coast of Japan, when they immediately secured a small sailing craft, and with Ten-Ichi as skipper had started away, unaccompanied, through the darkened hours of the early morning.

Throughout all the day and much of the succeeding night, they had sailed on and on, at last entering the mouth of a small river, where, after ascending it for several miles, they abandoned the larger craft and committed themselves to the little punt that had been dragging astern.

From the river they presently turned into the narrow waterway already described.

To do this they were obliged to lift their boat over the small dam which separated it from the river, for the waterway, while it seemed to be merely an irrigating canal, was, in reality a highway of water which had been constructed for the very purposes to which it was now being put—that of affording a private and also a secret means of approaching one of the many magnificent summer palaces of the Mikado.

Of the two in the boat, Ten-Ichi alone wore a disguise, and his was merely that of a boatman who had been engaged to take a tourist upon a coasting expedition. Nick Carter had preferred for once to travel as the Creator made him, although, to be sure, the name which the purser of the steamer had registered for him was not his own.

"Ten-Ichi," said the detective again, after a few moments of silence, "when you asked me to come here and you put your case as strongly as you did, I consented to something which I never did before, and that was to travel, in a sense, in the dark. I have accompanied you all the way from New York to a point within a few minutes' travel of the palace of the Mikado, without obliging you to answer questions about which I am very curious."

"And in doing so," interrupted Ten-Ichi, "you have conferred a boon upon me which nothing short of lifelong loyalty to you on my part can repay. I asked you, sir, to come with me to my emperor and to permit him to reply to every question you would have asked me. In consenting to that condition, you have enabled me to keep my oath of secrecy to him. I can never express my gratitude.

"Then don't try. Are we almost there?"

"When we pass the next turn we will come to the wall of the palace."

"And then?"

"At four o'clock, by your watch, for it agrees with the time at Tokio, the gate in the wall will be lifted and we shall pass through."

"The gate will be opened in expectation of our arrival, eh?"

"It will be opened to admit us, for the emperor knows that we will be there."

"Humph! Your emperor has almost as much confidence in you as I have—eh, Ten-Ichi?"

"The Mikado has confidence in the fulfillment of his own orders."

"I see."

"He ordered me to be at this gate at this time. He knows that if I am alive I will be there."

"But he could not know that I would come with you."

"He had faith that you would do so, as I had also."

"Well, I did come, so everything has gone smoothly. Is it a part of the plan that he will receive us at once, and in person?"

"Certainly. He would not request that you travel this great distance to see him, and then commit the indignity of keeping you waiting."

"I hope not, for to tell you the truth, I should feel very little inclined to wait."

"He will not ask you to do so."

"We have certainly arrived in secrecy, Ten-Ichi."

"Also in obedience to the emperor, Mr. Carter."

"By Jove, my lad! I would not have thought, a month ago, that I had so much curiosity in my make-up, but I will confess that you have interested me in this enterprise. What the Emperor of Japan can want of Nick Carter is enough of a question in itself; but why he should take the extraordinary measures he has to secure the interview, is an interrogation point that amazes me."

"You will soon know, for we are at the bend. We will arrive at the gate in two minutes more."

"Good."

"Bow your head, sir. The bushes are very low here. Now you may raise it again."

The punt stopped and hung motionless upon the water.

"We have arrived," said Ten-Ichi. "In a moment the gate will be raised."

"I suppose that dense blackness ahead of us is the wall," said Nick.

"Yes. If you will observe it closely, you will presently see a light appear. That will be when the gate is raised and the light beyond it penetrates to us."

"Who will receive us here at the gate, Ten-Ichi?"

"I do not know. It may be that the emperor will do you the compliment to come to the gate in person."

Nick uttered a low whistle of astonishment.

"He is a democratic Mikado," he said.

"He is a great and a good man, who loves his people and who admires manhood wherever he finds it. He will receive you as a brother."

"Then he won't find me lacking in cordiality. How will we converse, Ten-Ichi? In what language?"

"In any one you choose. He speaks all languages with equal fluency."

"Then let it be English."

"Yet you speak Japanese as well as I do."

"That may be; but I prefer to think in English, when I can."

"Very well. Look! The gate is raising."

"So it is."

A square of mellow light, six feet in height and width appeared in the wall in front of them, and instantly Ten-Ichi sent the punt forward.

In another moment they had passed through, and by the sound of splashing waters Nick knew that the gate had dropped into place behind them.

But he was not interested in the gateway at that moment. What he saw ahead of him was more to the purpose of attracting his attention, for standing upon a carpeted platform directly in their path were three men, and one of them, he instantly decided, was the Mikado of Japan.

He had come in person to welcome Nick Carter to the palace.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE MIKADO.

Ten-Ichi leaped first from the punt and hastened to prostrate himself at the feet of his emperor, but he was almost instantly bidden to rise, and in a rich, mellow voice that impressed Nick the moment he heard it.

"A man who speaks in that voice and with that kindly tone must be a good fellow," was the mental comment of the detective as he followed, somewhat more leisurely, his young assistant to the carpeted platform; but he leaped upon it with a quick, agile and graceful bound, so that Ten-Ichi had barely had time to resume an upright attitude when Nick saluted the emperor with the same inimitable bow that he would have employed in greeting any gentleman.

But the Mikado stretched forth his right hand instantly, clasping Nick's.

"How do you do, Mr. Carter?" he asked, in perfect English. "In your own country, men who are friends greet one another by shaking hands, do they not? Then let us shake hands, for I not only feel that we will become good friends, but I wish to thank you for your goodness in rendering the mission of my favorite son a success."

"Your son?" said Nick.

Then, laughing heartily, he turned to Ten-Ichi.

"You young rascal!" he exclaimed, "I understand now why you adore the man as well as love the emperor. Sir," he added, addressing the Mikado, "I almost envy you the possession of such a son. Let our mutual admiration for Ten-Ichi be a bond of fellowship between us, and let us shake hands again on the compact."

The two men who had accompanied the emperor to the place of meeting were a part of his personal body guard, and having made the punt secure, they threw open a wide door in the vaultlike chamber in which Nick had been received, and the Mikado, after motioning to Ten-Ichi to lead the way, took Nick by the arm and passed through, following him.

In this way they passed through a long and narrow corridor, ascended a short flight of stairs, then through other corridors and so on through a succession of rooms until at last they emerged into one that might have been located in the city of New York, if one were to judge by appearance, for everything about the room, even to the smallest details of its appointments, was thoroughly American.

"This room adjoins your bedchamber and is for your individual uses," said the Mikado. "I have had it prepared especially for your occupancy while you are a resident of the palace. And now, sir, you are fatigued. I will come to you again at three in the afternoon, after you are thoroughly rested. Ten-Ichi will attend to your immediate wants, after which he will come to me for a moment before I retire."

"So, my young princeling," said Nick, when the Mikado had withdrawn, "you played a fine trick upon me, didn't you? Go to your daddy, now, for I can see that he wants you very badly. The only thing that I want just now is that bed."

"And something to eat?"

"Well, yes, a bite."

"The attendants are bringing it now. I will go as you say, for my father is awaiting me. Your refreshment will be here in a moment. A touch of that bell will bring people to wait upon you. You have only to express a wish to have it gratified. Good-night, sir. I wish to express once more my gratitude to you."

"All right, lad. Skip along now. You may be a prince of Japan, but as long as I am here you remain my assistant just the same. Don't forget that."

"I am not likely to do so, sir."

* * * * * * *

At three o'clock that afternoon the Mikado of Japan entered the room in the summer palace that had been assigned to the detective.

Nick, who had long since risen, and was therefore now thoroughly rested from the fatigues of his journey, was waiting to receive him, and was pleased as well as surprised at the punctuality of the emperor.

Evidently with the intention of putting the detective thoroughly at his ease, the Mikado was attired in the costume of an American, so that he appeared as any gentleman might have done who had come there merely for the purposes of an interview.

Once more he shook hands with his guest with the utmost cordiality.

"I am glad to see that you are rested after your journey, Mr. Carter," he said. "I hope that you have been well attended since your arrival."

"Perfectly, sir."

"Before we begin the regular business of this interview, I wish to impress upon you my wish that we meet always on the basis of friends and that all needless formalities be omitted between us. An emperor can have but few friends, and I would consider it a privilege to count you as one of mine. Whenever we are fortunate enough to find ourselves alone together or only in the presence of Ten-Ichi, we will understand each other much better if we meet on common ground."

"I appreciate this courtesy, sir, more than I can say," replied Nick.

"It is even a greater privilege to me than it is to you, Mr. Carter, although you may not see it in that light."

Nick bowed.

"May I inquire about Ten-Ichi?" he asked.

"The boy is in my private cabinet, waiting until I summon him here. He is my favorite son, although he is not the heir to the throne. You are fond of him, I hope?"

"I am greatly attached to him. He has won my admiration and my confidence as well as my affection."

"Good! It pleases me to hear you speak well of him. I have never found him wanting, and I am sure that I never will."

"I believe, from what little I have seen of him, that I can assure you of that much, sir."

"What has he told you concerning the purpose of your expedition to Japan?"

"Nothing, save that his emperor commanded him to bring me here. I came, not because of that command, but as a favor to Ten-Ichi."

"You were not even aware of the relationship between us?"

"No. Not till you mentioned it when we arrived."

"He carried his reticence a step farther than was necessary. However, that does not matter now, since you are here."

"No."

"A few words will decide whether you will consent to perform the service for me that I desire; so if you will give me your attention I will explain in a few words my purpose in asking you to come here."

"I am all attention, sir."

"In brief, then, I have need of your services in the work of my secret service. Your fame has traveled here before you, Mr. Carter, and for that reason I have been convinced, for some time past, that you, and you alone, are the man who can do what I want done."

"Well?"

"I know, among other things, that you are a linguist; that you speak Russian and Japanese with the same fluency that you use the English language; that you have been in Russia and are therefore familiar with that country, its people, its customs, and what is of more importance, with its diplomacy."

"Can any person who is not at or near the head of Russian affairs be said to be familiar with its diplomacy, sir?" asked Nick.

"Well said; but of course you understand my meaning."

"I think I do."

"The diplomatic relations between Russia and Japan are always more or less strained."

"I have no doubt of that, sir."

"Just now they are at the point of breaking, but the possibility is that the differences will be arranged as they have been before, many times, and that the impending rupture will be patched so that no break will be apparent to the outside world, at least."

"And, in a word, you wish me to take a hand, in the interests of Japan, in the game of diplomacy?"

"Exactly that, Mr. Carter?"

"And you have chosen to have me brought here secretly so that even your own secret service agents may not know of my presence or of my work, unless I choose in person to enlighten them."

"That is the correct view."

"And what is the specific aim of my work?"

"To avert, if possible, war between Japan and Russia."

"That would appear, on the face of it, to be a big contract, sir."

"Yes; but not an impossible one."

"You have a specific reason for that statement, have you not?"

"Certainly."

"And that is?"

"Simply that the fault—in other words, the reason for the constant strain under which the diplomacy between the two countries labors—exists here in Japan."

"Ah! I begin to understand, sir."

"The fault is in the weakness of my own secret service, and in the superexcellence of theirs."

"Yes."

"There is a leakage, Mr. Carter."

"In your own palace?"

"In my own palace. My ministers have been unable to prepare a document, even in the utmost privacy, the purport of which has not been in the hands of the Russian court before it has left our own hands, so that in each case, many times weeks before we could expect a reply through the usual diplomatic channels, Russia has been able to adopt measures which nullified in advance any steps that we had taken. Frankly, by the time our diplomatic notes have been delivered in St. Petersburg the reasons for writing them have been obviated, or the conditions so altered by a radical change of the Russian policy, that they have been rendered worthless."

"The whole point of the condition, then, is that Russia has a way of knowing what is happening in Tokio almost as soon as your own ministers know it."

"It would seem, Mr. Carter, as if there were times when Russia knows of events that are to happen here, even before my ministers know it."

"Your emphasis on the word "before" means that there are times when you are led almost to the point of doubting your own ministers."

"It means even more than that."

"How, sir?"

"Even to the point of doubting myself; or if such a thing were possible, of feeling that my ministers doubted me."

"Russia, then, has means of ascertaining—or has found at times a way to discover—secrets that were not known beyond your own cabinet."

"Beyond my own person, Mr. Carter."

"That can hardly be literally true, sir."

"And yet it is literally true, as you shall hear."

"Please tell me about a single instance of the kind, if you will, and in doing so, be careful to omit nothing of detail, however slight it may appear to you."

"I will do that, gladly."

"It is always well to remember in cases of this kind that the trivial incidents are apt to be fraught with the most importance, and it is only the mind that is trained to discovering the significance of minutiæ that is successful in grasping them."

"It is because I am convinced of that fact that I have requested your presence in Japan. I know, Mr. Carter, that you can transform yourself into a Russian or a Japanese at will, and that you can do it so cleverly that you avoid even the suspicion of your true identity. It is to ask you to be one or the other, or both, or neither, as your own ingenuity suggests, that I have besought your aid. A war between these two countries would be a terrible thing, and a lasting horror. Other countries would be involved, your own among them, I fear. The whole world would stand appalled by the events that would happen, one after another, in dreadful succession. I have succeeded in convincing myself that with your assistance such a calamity may be averted, and that is why I sent Ten-Ichi to America to induce you to come here."

CHAPTER III.

RUSSIAN DIPLOMACY—DEDUCTION BY INFERENCE.

"Your meaning, as I understand you, sir," said Nick, "is directly as follows: First, that the whole trend and aim of Russian diplomacy in working its way along the coast of the Pacific Ocean toward the south, is to anticipate every move you would make to defend your own rights, and that she has means of accomplishing that end that are unknown to you. Second, if her method of accomplishing that end were known to you and could be stopped so that your diplomatic notes could come and go through the proper channels and their contents remain unknown until arrival at their destinations, the danger of war, at least immediate war between the two countries would be in a great measure obviated; and third, that the very fact that Russia does adopt these means for defeating you is an additional, and in fact the most dangerous of your present differences. Now, sir, if you will tell me of the one instance you had in mind a moment ago, we will, if you please, get down to facts, and I think, if you will permit me to question you, we will get at them much more clearly and expeditiously than if you simply relate the circumstances."

"Then, Mr. Carter, by all means question me."

"You referred to a state secret that came to the knowledge of Russia almost before it had developed beyond your own knowledge."

"Absolutely before it had gone from my own knowledge. Russia's foreign minister knew of it before I had confided it to my own."

"Then he must have guessed it."

"No; I happen to know that the language employed was my own."

"Ah! Then you had committed your ideas to writing?"

"Yes; but in a form of cipher known only to myself."

"And you would add, of course, your secretary?"

"No, sir. To myself alone."

"Written by your own hand?"

"Yes."

"In the privacy of your own apartment?"

"Yes."

"And deposited where, after you had written it?"

"In a pocket of my clothing, on my own person."

"And that memoranda did not go out of your possession?"

"No. More than that, it was sealed, and the seal which I placed upon it at the time I formulated it has not been broken to this day. In other words, Mr. Carter, I have that document in my pocket at the present moment; it has not been out of my possession since I created it, almost two months ago; I have never told a human being a single clause that the document contains, and yet, only yesterday, through the Russian minister at this court, I received advices which make it certain that not only the import of that document, but the actual wording of it, is already known at St. Petersburg."

"This seems most astounding, sir."

"It is more; it is mysterious."

"Why, may I ask, have you waited almost two months before revealing the contents of the document even to one of your own advisers?"

"Because I have never for a moment intended the contents seriously."

"Ah! I see. You made use of the expedient as a test."

"Exactly."

"I think I understand. You embodied in those

notes certain things which you knew the Russian government desired you to do, or to accede to, as though you were yourself on the point of conceding them without waiting to be asked, and now you find that the proposition comes to you from Russia, couched in almost the same language you used in your notes."

"In precisely the same language."

"Then it would follow, sir, would it not, that if you intended that document for a test, that you have not actually kept it in your possession all the time—that is, upon your person?"

"I have left it overnight in my desk more than once. I have left it lying upon my desk for an hour or two at a time more than once. I have locked it in my private safe for days at a time. I have left it in the pocket of my clothing while I have been in my bath, and I have left it upon the table in my sleeping room at night. That is all."

"You have done these things purposely to discover if it was tampered with?"

"Yes."

"And you have discovered no evidence that it was?"

"Not one."

"All the time it was sealed?"

"Yes."

"Since you first committed it to writing, until the present moment, the seal has not been broken, to your knowledge?"

"No."

"And the writing itself is couched in a cipher which you say nobody but yourself understands—that is, so far as you know?"

"Exactly."

"You have the document with you now?"

"Yes."

"Let me see it."

The Mikado took from his pocket a linen envelope of the color of straw. Upon the front of it was written in English characters the two words, "Personal Memoranda." The flap was sealed with red wax, and that in turn bore the plain imprint of a ring which the emperor wore upon the thumb of his left hand.

Nick studied the seal intently through a magnifying glass and presently placed the document on the table beside him.

"Now let me see your ring," he suggested.

The ring was given to him and he subjected it to the same sharp scrutiny.

"Fortunately," he said, presently, "you are in the habit of removing this ring from your thumb whenever you wash your hands. It is so large and of such a shape as to make that proceeding a necessity. That is true, isn't it?"

"Perfectly true."

"Also, although almost two months have elapsed since you sealed this envelope, you have not had occasion to make use of this ring for such a purpose since you placed the seal here." And he touched the document on the table.

"That is true also, Mr. Carter; but how you determine that fact, I cannot imagine."

"Never mind. Let us proceed."

"Well, sir?"

"This envelope has been opened. The contents have been removed and copied and then returned. The person who disturbed the seal believed that he could do so without destroying the design, but in that he was mistaken. However, he had prepared himself for that emergency, and so was enabled to replace it, and he has done it so perfectly that the naked eye could not discover it. If you will take this glass you will be able to see that while he had very nearly imitated the exact quantity of wax, as well as the shape of it, that you used, he was not able entirely to remove the old wax that you used in the first place."

"How do you discover that?"

"Sealing wax at different degrees of temperature colors differently. An eye that is keen in the detection of colors will quickly observe the difference. Ordinary eyes can do so with the aid of a powerful glass. If you will look with this glass you will see that there are two places around the edge of that wax where the old was not entirely removed. Your spy did not heat his wax quite as hot as you did. His wax is redder than yours, although I have not a doubt that both are originally from the same stick."

"Yes," said the Mikado, "I see the spots you mention."

"Good! Now look at the indentation of the seal upon the wax. You will notice that one of the eyes of the dragon is blurred, and that an infinitesimal part of the point of one of the stars in blunted."

"Yes, I see both."

"Either might be caused by dust collecting in the ring, so now I will ask you to look at the ring itself. What do you discover concerning the relative point of the star and eye of the dragon to which I called your attention on the wax?"

"A tiny speck of something in each place; but they are not composed of dust."

"No."

"What, then?"

"Blue clay, sir, that had been worked and softened especially for the purpose of taking an impression of your ring."

"But how could that be accomplished without my knowledge?"

"Easily."

"The ring is never out of my possession. I never remove it save while washing my hands, and then I do not permit it out of my sight. It is my signet and I am very jealous of it."

"Very true; but you have a habit, also, have you not, of turning it inside when you have occasion to go abroad and do not wish to be recognized?"

"Certainly."

"And you do make such excursions, do you not?"

"Frequently. I presume Ten-Ichi has told you of my weakness."

"Ten-Ichi has told me absolutely nothing; but I can tell you something which perhaps you will think a mere stranger ought not to know."

"What is that, Mr. Carter?"

"Simply this: Either shortly before or shortly after you prepared this document—probably shortly after it—you engaged upon one of those excursions. I should say that the excursion was suggested to you rather than by you on this occasion."

"You are right, sir. It happened four weeks ago to-day."

Nick smiled.

"We are getting closer to the present mystery," he said. "I should not be surprised if you were to tell me that you went somewhere on a private shooting expedition, and that during your outing you were compelled at one point in the journey to steady yourself with your left hand while you climbed into or out of a boat."

The Mikado's eyes opened wide in amazement.

"One might suppose you to be a wizard!" he said.

"Not at all. It does not need a wizard to tell you that at some point of that expedition you soiled your left hand by clinging to something that you would not have touched had the act not been necessary in order to steady yourself, either to prevent a fall or to assist you in climbing; that you would not have been in a position of that kind in walking, or while on the back of a horse, and that, therefore, a boat is the most likely place for it to happen, and that about the only reason for your being in a boat and in a position where others were not constantly looking out for you in order to prevent such an incident as I have described, would be that you were on a secret hunting trip. Evidently you recall a circumstance such as I have described."

"You have described it almost word for word."

"Very well. Whatever it was that you clung to on that occasion was placed there for you to grasp, it had been prepared for you to grasp, and when you released it you had imprinted the seal of your signet upon it. If you know where the spot is and we can find the thing you took hold of, you will discover that a section of it is missing, for that section is that part that preserved the impression of your ring."

"This is most remarkable, Mr. Carter."

"Were you in a boat?"

"Yes."

"Had not something just been given into your right hand so that you could not use it in steadying yourself? Your gun, for instance?"

"Yes, my gun."

"And what did you grasp?"

"A projection from the side of the bank where we landed. I was stepping from the boat when it started backward and I seized the slimy end of a log that projected toward me, in order to hold the boat. I remember it perfectly. Afterward I rinsed my hand in the water and forgot the incident."

"Exactly, but you left the impression of your signet in some blue clay that had been worked into a niche in the log for that specific purpose, and the person who handed your gun to you and who moved the boat so that you would be obliged to seize the log, was the person who prepared the clay. Do you know who it was?"

CHAPTER IV.

A SPY FROM THE TERRIBLE THIRD SECTION.

"But all these things are of minor importance compared to the great question," continued the detective before the emperor could respond. "I have only gone into this particular matter in detail to impress upon you the importance of apparently trivial things when greater things are happening. Doubtless it was one of your personal servants who handed you the gun. He may not have known that the clay was there, or if he placed it there he may not have known what it was

for. Doubtless he was merely paid for what he did, being assured that no harm would come to you. All the same, if he is still in the palace, I should like to have a heart-to-heart talk with him."

"He is here. I will summon him at once."

"No, let him wait. I am not ready for him yet, for unless I am mistaken he is only a puppet for some greater rascal who is also in the palace. The idea with which we must begin operations is that every person in the palace save ourselves and Ten-Ichi are spies in the employ of Russia."

"Isn't that rather sweeping?"

"Decidedly so; but since we do not know whom to suspect, let us begin by suspecting everybody."

"Very well. What then?"

"Why, it follows then that the very trouble that you were at to keep the knowledge of my presence here a secret has been the best means of advertising it to the persons whom you wished not to know it. I haven't a doubt that it is already known in St. Petersburg that I am expected, or even that I have arrived."

"And our trouble and secrecy has been for naught?"

"Hardly that. I think I can make it count yet."

"Tell me how."

"By working in the open for a few days, then abandoning the job and returning to America."

"But, my dear sir——"

"Pardon me, your majesty," said Nick, coldly, and at the same time winking with his left eye in a manner so droll that the Mikado of Japan smiled broadly and was silent, "that is the only way. I will look over the ground carefully and I will advise you to the best of my ability, but as soon as that is done—say after a week—I must leave this delicate work to your own secret service men."

Again he winked, and the dignity of the emperor nearly lost itself in a genuine laugh; but his wit was as keen as his appreciation for a joke, and he replied in kind:

"Let me hope that you may be induced to change your mind."

"Ah! well, I will think it over. However, I will decide by the end of a week."

"If that is the best that you can do for me now, of course I will have to accept it. An emperor never pleads."

"May I offer you an American cigar?" asked Nick, with another wink. "I have some in this bag we brought with us. One moment, please."

He crossed the room to his bag and abstracted a box of cigars, then, having passed one of them to his companion, he busied himself with lighting another with his left hand, while with his right he wrote on a pad of paper that he also threw upon the table from his bag:

"There is a spy concealed beneath this floor now. Do nothing. Return to your own apartment. Send Ten-Ichi here in fifteen minutes. Let him take me to you. We will walk together in the open grounds of the palace. Then I will talk to you."

"They are good cigars, I think," he said, aloud, to which the Mikado assented. After that there was a few moments of desultory talk, and presently the emperor quitted the room, saying as he took his departure:

"Since you have decided that secrecy will not avail us, Mr. Carter, I will send for you presently and ask you to look at the palace and the grounds."

As soon as the door closed behind him, Nick seized one end of the rug that was stretched upon the floor before his bed, and with a quick motion pulled it into a heap at the opposite side of the room. Then, stepping suddenly forward so that he occupied the place on the floor which the center of the rug had covered, he said, coldly and distinctly:

"I know that you are under the floor of this room directly under the spot where I stand. If you try to escape I will shoot through the floor and certainly hurt you if I do not kill you. If you answer me I may permit you to escape. You understand English or you wouldn't be where you are. If you don't answer I will shoot just to prove that you are not there—or that you are. Are you there?"

"Yes. Me here, allee samee, like lat in a tlap," came the reply in pigeon English.

"Hello! A Chinaman, eh?" said Nick, and he winked at himself in the mirror opposite, as if in assurance that he was not so easily fooled as he appeared to be. "How did you get there?"

"Clawled."

"Oh, you crawled. Well, I'll show you how to do some exceptionally fine crawling before I am through with you, Chinky. Where did you crawl from?"

"Outside."

"Well, don't try to crawl back again unless you want to have a hole in you somewhere. Now it strikes me that the board directly over you looks as if it had been loosened so that you could enter this room if you happened to want to do so. Suppose you push upward against it?"

"No pushee, no pullee; no movee."

"Oh, yes; it will move all right. Push, now unless——"

He paused significantly and smiled when he saw the board slowly raise from its place in the floor and a gruff voice not at all like the one that had proceeded from the supposed Chinaman, said:

"I'll consent to any terms you can make if only you won't give me up to the Japs."

"Hello! You're no Chink after all, are you? Well, well! Come. Climb out into the room and shove that board into place. If you so much as raise a hand—but you won't. You've got too much sense and too little sand to do that. Now sit down in that chair and put your hands behind you till I fit you with a pair of bracelets. We can talk better that way, and I won't have to watch you quite so closely. There! That will do. Now, what are you, anyway, besides a spy?"

"I have ceased to be a spy," rejoined the man, coolly.

"So you have. So you have, to be sure; and my facetious friend, unless you are mighty civil, and for once in your life decide to tell the truth without reservation, it won't be long before you will have ceased to be a man. My young friend, Ten-Ichi, will be here in a moment, and if I should turn you over to him and he should transfer you to the tender mercy of——"

"Say no more, sir, I beg. I know the rest."

"Do you? Tell me; what would they do with you if I should decide to give you up? Eh?"

"Oh, I'd receive the best of attention. They'd cut off my head, disembowel me and chuck what was left of me to the dogs."

"A pleasant contemplation, isn't it?"

"Delightful."

"You look like a Frenchman; are you?"

"I have that distinguished honor, sir."

"You are also what is called in my country, sassy"

"I inherited that gift."

"And improved upon it after you got it, I suppose? What is your name?"

"I have so many, sir, that I am puzzled which one to give you."

"Doubtless. Give me the one by which your present employers know you."

"Paul Lafont."

"Now, who is your present employer?"

"The chief of the famous Third Section of the Russian police at St. Petersburg."

"Good! That sounds true."

"It is true. I have decided to tell you the truth."

"Oh! you have! Why?"

"Because I know you by reputation, and therefore know that it would be useless to attempt to lie to Nick Carter."

"Your answer certainly bespeaks you French. How long have you been here?"

"About five minutes."

"Humph!" said Nick. "It is about as dangerous to try to be funny with Nick Carter as it is to lie to him. Now, again, how long have you been here?"

"In Japan?"

"Yes."

"About a year."

"And in the palace of the emperor—this one and others?"

"Ten months."

"Do you know of other Russian spies about the person of the emperor?"

"Yes."

"How many are there?"

"Five, including myself."

"Then let us say that there are four."

"Four be it, sir."

"How many are at present in this palace?"

"Four."

"If all the Russian spies at present in Japan were drawn up in line, how many of them would you recognize?"

"Two only, besides the four I have mentioned."

"Where are they located?"

"One is at the office of the foreign minister, the other is what you might call at large, since he has no definite station."

"In order to save your life are you willing to point out the six you have mentioned?"

"Pardon me, sir, not to save my life; merely to prolong it."

"Nevertheless, answer."

"I am."

"You are rather more tractable than I expected you to be."

"I am simply sensible. If you should give me up to the Japs I would be dead in an hour, for while Russia has a pleasant manner of getting rid of objectionable people, Japan could give them cards and spades on that subject. If I did not answer your questions truthfully you would give me up to them. By answering

you at all I call down upon myself the vengeance of the Third Section, which never sleeps, but by being truthful I win your confidence and perhaps induce you to employ me. Thus, I prolong my life."

"I see. Your reasoning is logical. I will think about it."

"Will you tell me, sir, how you discovered that I was under your floor?"

"I smelled you."

"Eh?"

"You forgot that you had eaten garlic overnight, or forgot that the rest of the world might not have eaten it."

"*Sacre!* So I did. And you would have shot me, through the floor?"

"Most certainly."

Lafont shrugged his shoulders and glanced with admiration at his captor.

"In what capacity do you serve in the palace?" asked Nick.

"I have the honor to be valet to one of the gentlemen-in-waiting."

"Which one?"

"The Marquis of Bacco, who is a confidential friend of the Mikado. May I ask a question?"

"Yes."

"Were you sincere when you told the emperor that you would remain a week or more here and then return to America?"

"Certainly. Why?"

"Will you take me there with you if I will serve you faithfully till the time for your departure?"

"Yes."

"In that way I can prolong my life indefinitely."

"Possibly."

"Will you do that, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes."

Nick stepped forward quickly and unfastened the shackles from Lafont's wrists.

"Climb back into your box, now, and I will close it," he said. "At midnight return to me here by the same route. Go!"

Five minutes later Ten-Ichi entered the room.

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER PLANS TO DISAPPEAR.

When Nick, accompanied by Ten-Ichi, reviewed the emperor, the trio adjourned at once to the court of the palace, which was a large area inclosed on three sides by the walls of the building, while the fourth side was an open space which overlooked a beautiful valley that stretched away over hill and dale to the northward; and there, upon the coping of the wall the detective and the Mikado strolled up and down, side by side, talking.

"I believe it is understood that I am to perform the work you desire of me, in my own way and according to my own methods, without inquiry or question, sir," said Nick, by way of opening the conversation.

"Decidedly, Mr. Carter," was the emperor's reply.

"Then, as we would say in English, let me begin by giving you a few pointers."

"All you wish. We are on the footing of equals while you are here."

"First, when I shall have departed from the palace, as I propose really to do, I wish you to forget the name of Carter, save as a memory."

"I will agree to do so."

"Second, I shall convince you, as well as others, that I really have gone out of the country."

"Do you mean that seriously?"

"Quite seriously, sir."

"But you do not intend really to desert me?"

"That question brings me to the third pointer."

"Very good. What is it?"

"I want you to have enough confidence in me to believe that no matter how absolutely perfect may be to you the evidence that I have gone, that I am all the while in touch with you. In short, that I have not gone away at all."

"I do not think I fully understand you."

"This is what I mean. I will succeed in convincing you by the unmistakable evidence of your own eyes—and Ten-Ichi's as well—that I have gone away from Japan and indeed sailed for my own country, but in spite of that I want you still to believe that I am here and always somewhere near to you."

"You mean, then, that you will not really go, although it will appear that you have done so?"

"I mean exactly that very thing."

"I will believe you and have faith."

"Thank you. Now tell me—how long does it take to go by land from here to the steamer that brought us to Japan?"

"Two hours."

"And the steamer sails—when?"

"One week from yesterday."

"Good! I will sail by that steamer—the same that brought me over."

The Mikado looked as he felt—puzzled.

"In the meantime," continued Nick, "I wish it to become generally known that I am Nick Carter, and that I came here as a guest of Ten-Ichi. I wish to be provided with an escort and shown the sights that are near enough to the palace to be worth attention. It can be given out that I have saved the life of Ten-Ichi while he was abroad; that will account for your unusual interest in me."

"Yes."

"In every way I would like to be entertained, during the week, as if I were almost a royal guest. The supposed saving of the life of your son will uphold you in that pretense."

"Certainly."

"Particularly, I wish to have receptions and fêtes given in my honor."

"I will do that gladly. I have only regretted——"

"Pardon me for interrupting. My purpose in making that demand is twofold."

"Yes?"

"I want to meet, and personally to become acquainted with not only your own ministers, and the men of affairs of Japan, but also every member of the Russian and French legations, as well as others."

"That shall be done."

"And also, I want them to know when I depart. I want, in other words, that they shall see me sail away."

"That can also be done."

"How?"

"When the time for your departure draws near I will arrange a select reception on board the steamer on which you are supposed to sail. The invitations will be extended in such a manner that the men whom you desire to be present on that occasion cannot well refuse to come."

"Excellent."

"You see, I have perfect faith that you will not go, after all."

"I will remain in Japan, although I will prove to you and to Ten-Ichi as well as the others that I have gone."

"You will find it a difficult task to leave the ship without being discovered, and more than that, when you don't arrive at the other side spies will report by cable the fact of your non-arrival in America."

"Oh, no they will not. On the contrary, they will report my arrival."

"But, Mr. Carter, how can they do that if you remain here?"

"Before the ship reaches an American port I will have proved to you that I am still here, although when it does arrive their spies will report that I have landed there."

"You speak in enigmas."

"I trade in enigmas, sir."

"So you do, but permit me to say that you are, yourself, the greatest enigma of all."

"Perhaps."

"You have already established that fact to my satisfaction."

"Then let me establish what I have said, as well."

"Are there any further 'pointers,' Mr. Carter?" and the Mikado smiled.

"Yes. Let us begin operations at once—this very evening."

"Consider it done. I will give an informal dinner to-night to the generals, admirals and government officials who happen to be within call."

"Good. And after that?"

"Every day and evening until the hour and moment of your departure will be taken up with entertaining you."

"Excellent."

"Mr. Carter," said the emperor, slowly, "I am not a suspicious man by nature, but my life is so surrounded with intrigues that I am rendered so in spite of my better self. Will you give me one more assurance that I can rely upon you? Pardon me, but I cannot help asking you this favor."

"My word of honor as a man, given you on the basis of the friendship you were so kind to offer, and upon the love and affection we both feel for Ten-Ichi is the only additional assurance I can give to you."

"And it is enough. I accept and believe. No matter what my eyes and senses may tell me, no matter what may happen to convince me to the contrary, I will believe that you remain here. On my reverence for Buddha, I swear it!"

* * * * * * * *

A few minutes before midnight that same night Nick excused himself to the emperor and the guests who had assembled to do him honor, and hastening to his own room first dismissed his attendants, of which, by the way, there were so many that they were a nuisance rather than of assistance to him—and having assured himself that he was alone and beyond the prob-

ability of disturbance for the remainder of the night, pulled back the rug and raised the board in the floor in preparation for the coming of Paul Lafont.

The detective was by no means certain that the man would come, although he had not hesitated to let him depart at the time of his capture. Adherents to his staff gained in that manner were rarely welcome to Nick Carter, but in this instance he had calculated that the man could do him no especial harm, in the light of the future course he had decided to adopt, and that he would be more troublesome as a prisoner than in any other way; while, if it were possible to make use of him, he might be made useful in spite of his readiness and willingness to betray his masters, whoever they happened to be.

And that there happened to be a particular use to which Nick desired to put him, will presently become evident.

Nick had not long to wait.

Almost on the stroke of twelve the man appeared.

Drawing him into the room, Nick closed down the opening in the floor and replaced the rug.

"Now, Lafont," he said, "sit there near the light, where I can have a good look at you. I want to see if you will be of use."

"I can be of use if you will permit me."

"No doubt. No doubt. You did wisely to come here on time. Are you at liberty from your employer for the rest of the night?"

"Yes."

"What time must you report back to him in the morning?"

"Well, considering the fact that he was comfortably drunk when I put him to bed half an hour ago, he's good until ten in the morning."

"I noticed that he left the table quite early," said Nick. Then, musingly: "Yes, I think you will do."

"Of course I will, sir."

"Tut, tut! Don't get fresh, sonny. Answer when you are spoken to. You don't know yet just what use I intend to make of you, and you won't know for several days to come; but I am going to put you to a small test to-night."

"I am ready, sir."

"I wonder if you do intend to serve me faithfully?"

"Well, sir, the conditions are such that I cannot expect you to place much confidence in me at first, but if you will let me work for you, and with you, I will serve you faithfully."

"Humph! We will see about that. Now, tell me, where is the other end of that hole through which you came here?"

"In the room directly underneath. It is a lumber room. Things are stored and piled in it. These three rooms which you use have never been furnished since the palace was built, until they were made ready for you. I don't know why, but they were not."

"And what is the story underneath this one used for?"

"It is only a half story, sir; really only what is called in this country, an air foundation, to keep the atmosphere of the rooms over it pure. The rooms there are mostly used for store rooms, although servants sleep in some of them. This box under your floor, and the means of getting to it, I arranged myself when I heard that you were coming here, and that these rooms were being prepared for you."

"Well, that's all right. What I want to know is, can you take me out of the palace, now, without the knowledge of any other person?"

"Easily."

"How?"

"By the same road I prepared for myself after I came here, so that I would have no difficulty in reporting to my superiors when necessary."

"I see. Or of getting away if things got too hot for you."

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you skip to-night, and try to dodge me?"

"Because I believed it to be more to my own interests to remain and report to you as I had agreed to do. I want to tell you frankly, sir, that Paul Lafont works first for himself."

"I can quite believe that."

"I consider my own person of more importance to myself, than the Czar of all the Russians."

"Quite right. So I do. When you have occasion to leave the palace, do you wear a disguise?"

"Certainly. It would not do for the valet of the Marquis of Hacco to be seen wandering around the country at night alone, particularly as he happens to be a Frenchman, and Frenchmen are supposed to be more or less in favor of Russia."

"Quite right. How far are we from the city?"

"Only a short distance."

"And do you know a place there called the Quoy Low Fong. It is a Chinese hotel."

"I know it well."

"How long will it take to go there?"

"I can get you there in an hour."

"Good. There is where I wish to go."

"Very well. Shall we start now?"

"Yes. Can you talk Chinese?"

"Perfectly."

Nick opened one of his trunks, which had been brought to the palace during the day, and took therefrom two Chinese disguises, wigs with queues, etc., etc., and throwing one of them on a chair, began rapidly to don the other.

"Let me see how well you can play the Chinaman," he said, in the Chinese tongue, "and make haste, for I have much to do."

Twenty minutes later two splendid imitations of Mongolians glided like shadows from beneath the walls of the palace and started rapidly toward the city which was only a few miles distant, and presently they entered the streets and made their way rapidly along through the darkness. Presently they came to a halt, and one of them pointed toward a building of Chinese architecture, and the voice of Paul Lafont said:

"That is the Quoy Low Fong."

"Very good," replied Nick. "Follow me into the place. We will order something to eat, and if while we are there I should leave you, you will remain seated where you happen to be until I return, or call for you to follow. By obeying orders to the letter, you may succeed in convincing me that you are sincere in your desire to serve me."

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN CHICK APPEARS UPON THE SCENE.*

The general room of the hotel was a quaint mixture of Japanese and Chinese, and in general appearance suggested the ordinary Chinese restaurant of the city of New York, although it was of course much more extensive and elaborate.

Many of the tables were occupied when they entered, and Nick led the way to one that was rather secluded. Casting his eyes rapidly over the occupants of the room while he gave his order in the most perfect Chinese, he discovered, sitting alone at a table in a far corner of the room, the individual for whom he was looking.

Nevertheless, he remained at the table where the food was served until he had partially disposed of his share, when without another word to his companion, he rose and crossed to the other table.

For a moment he conversed with the stranger rapidly in Chinese, and their conversation, if it happened to be overheard by others, denoted simply that they were old acquaintances who had happily met by accident; and presently they left the table together and went out of the hotel.

A short walk took them to a small square where there were benches for seats, and upon one of these the two seated themselves, and at once began conversing in low tones—but in English.

"Well, Chick," said Nick, "did you get tired of waiting?"

"Not especially," replied Chick, for it was the great detective's chief assistant. "I've had no end of fun, Nick. Ten-Ichi never got on to the fact that I was aboard of the ship, did he?"

"No. He did not suspect it; and as things have turned out, I am very glad. By Jove, Chick, it was a lucky move that I decided to have you come along with us in the way you did. If I had known exactly what was to happen after we got here, I could not have planned it better."

"What's up?"

"Well, in a word, you came over in the steerage as a Cooley on his way home, but you'll go back on the same steamer in the first cabin, as Nick Carter in person."

Chick laughed.

"You've got to send yourself home, have you?"

"That's about the size of it. I'm sorry, too, for I would have preferred keeping you here with me, Chick. Still, you've got to go."

"When and how?"

"Next Wednesday."

"What am I to do in the meantime?"

"Stay right where you are till Tuesday night. Then at about this hour I will meet you here. You will return to the palace with me and take my place. In the meantime, I will have engaged passage in the name of Nick Carter, for you must travel as myself. You have made up to represent me so many times, and you can make your voice and your manner so exactly like mine that there will not be the slightest danger of discovery."

"Certainly not. I have done the trick too often to be caught now."

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* In some respects this story is similar to the story which first introduced Nick Carter to the world reading public—to the number of millions.

"Right you are, Chick."

"Who is the chap who came in with you to-night?"

"That brings me to the rest of my plans."

Then Nick rapidly related all that had taken place at the palace since his arrival, omitting nothing, so that when he had finished, Chick was as thoroughly posted as if he had been there and witnessed everything in person.

"Now," he said, in conclusion, "this is the scheme. Lafont knows that his life isn't worth a picayune if he remains here. He wants to return to America with me and work for me. You shall take him back with you and keep him with you till I return, no matter if it is a year; and during that time never let him once suspect that you are not Nick Carter. He might turn at any moment if he discovered that I was still over here, and inform against us, for as he very plainly admitted he is working for Lafont."

"Correct. Well?"

"I'll let Lafont sail away in the ship in any disguise he chooses to adopt. He can go in the steerage, as he pleases. He'll go all right, as soon as he is convinced that I am going, and you must keep him convinced of that."

"I'll do that, sure."

"In the meantime I will have questioned him enough so that when he is gone I will have no difficulty in playing the part of valet to the Marquis of Hacco. As he is of the right build and voice I can make up to represent him perfectly."

"No fear about that."

"So you see, the thing will work both ways. All Japan, and all Russia that is in Japan, will be assured that Nick Carter has sailed away for his own country."

"But, all the same, Nick Carter will be right here on the spot, ready for business."

"Right you are, my lad. I think I will always call you my lad, Chick."

"Well, I think you have a right to do so."

"And," continued the detective, "the only person in the whole outfit whom I might have cause to suspect of treachery, will be on the ship with you, and he will be more convinced than anybody else that I am there also."

"Correct."

"When he is gone, I will simply fill his place, and then, as the Irishman said when he put the gondolas on the park lake, we'll 'let nature take its course.'"

"Good!"

"The only difficult part you will have to play will be in taking leave of Ten-Ichi. 'He is, as you know, sharper than a steel trap, and it won't be easy to fool him."

"I'll bet you a big red apple that I can do it."

"If I did not suppose you could, I would not ask you to try. But I can post you thoroughly, Tuesday night."

"I'll be at the Quoy Low Fong waiting for you."

"Then good-night. I'll go back to the palace now, with Lafont."

* * * * * * *

"I see you are not above making use of the Chinkies yourself," ventured Lafont, when he was taking leave of the detective after they had discarded their disguises in the palace. "I think I have seen that chap before to-night."

"Have you? Where?"

"In Hong Kong."

"Perhaps. He has been there. Come to me here again to-morrow night, for I shall have something more for you to do, and if you are in earnest about going to America with me, a plan to propose. In fact, Lafont, as long as I am here in the palace, I shall want you to come here as near midnight every night as you can, and if I am not here, wait till I come."

"I'm serving under your orders now. I'll come. Russian Third-Section business has no more attractions for me. If they ever discovered what I have done already, my life wouldn't be worth that," and he snapped his fingers.

"And," said Nick, significantly, "if I find that you fail me, take my word for it, your life will be worth still less."

"I believe you. Good-night."

"Good-night."

From that time on for the remainder of Nick's supposed stay in Japan, every waking hour was occupied—or, at least, every hour when Nick was supposed to be awake.

During that time he met, and learned to know quite well by name as well as reputation, every man of prominence in Japan whom he cared to study, or for whom he believed he might have use later.

And during that time also, he held many conversations with Paul Lafont, drawing from him, bit by bit, every atom of information which the Frenchman had gained during his stay in Japan, as well as other and equally valuable intelligence concerning the workings

of the Russian spy system as operated there, and in St. Petersburg.

There was not a subject that might be of value to him later on in the work he had to do, which he did not touch upon and thoroughly master.

Not least among the acquirements he attained during that interval, was a thorough knowledge of the identity of all the Russian spies in Japan with whom Lafont was acquainted, and regarding whom he possessed any information.

Sometimes, during these moments of questions and answers, Lafont looked curiously into the detective's face, and once he said:

"If you hadn't given me your word that you were going to take me to America with you, I should think that you were acquiring all this information simply for the purpose of shipping me off on that steamer alone and remaining here yourself after all."

Nick only laughed his reply.

"Anyway," pursued the Frenchman, "I don't see what good all this information is going to do you. It isn't any of my business, I know, but if you wouldn't mind telling me, I should like to know."

"Well," drawled Nick. "I expect to live several years yet, if all goes well. It is more than likely that I may visit Japan again, sometime—or Russia. What you have told me might be of benefit in such a case; don't you think so?"

"Sure."

"I don't blame you for having doubts, Lafont, but I'll tell you what you can do."

"What?"

"You have said that you will fix yourself up as an American tourist, for the passage on the ship, and that your berth is the one adjoining the suite which the emperor has taken for me."

"Yes."

"Very well. Instead of waiting here till Wednesday morning before you disappear, skip out Tuesday afternoon."

"Yes; and have them search the ship for me and find me."

"On the contrary, do not go aboard the ship till I appear, and then rush forward and claim acquaintance with me. I'll do my part. If they do search the ship, they won't find you."

"Splendid! I'll do that."

"You might, if you asked for it, get a leave of absence for Tuesday and Wednesday, or a part of Wednesday till the ship has sailed, so that the marquis will not think you have deserted him. Just ask him for a leave of absence till Wednesday evening."

"Good. I'll do that, too."

"Then you see, when you once recognize me, and I have recognized you, you can butt in upon the whole shooting match and stay there. Don't you see that it will work both ways? You will be sure that I sail on the ship, and I will be sure that you sail."

The detective's laugh when he concluded his suggestions was really filled with humor, and, although Lafont laughed also, it is doubtful if he saw and understood the real humor of the occasion.

During all this time, Ten-Ichi was plainly and visibly unhappy.

Nick had not given him the assurances he had bestowed upon the Mikado, that he would remain in Japan in spite of all appearances to the contrary—and on this point he had also bound the emperor to secrecy, so that Ten-Ichi really supposed that the detective had decided to abandon the expedition to Japan.

During the afternoon of Tuesday, while he and Nick happened to be alone together in the grand court of the palace that has been already described, he introduced the subject.

"My chief," he said, "it breaks my heart to have you go away."

"Ah! but you will recover from that, my boy."

"No, I will not. If it were not that my duty is here with my father, I should ask you to take me with you."

"As it is you must remain."

"Yes," sadly. "Will you tell me truly why you go away?"

"No, Ten-Ichi, I cannot tell you truly, and, therefore, I will not tell you at all, more than to say this: The best interests of your father demands it. We are quite agreed upon that point."

"And yet it all seems very strange to me."

"Ten-Ichi, I will promise you this much: Although I go away from Japan to-morrow, I will return, and that, sooner than you think. I will promise you that, so cheer up."

"Yes. I will try. But the time must be long to me, however short it may be to others," said Ten-Ichi.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFERENCE IN THE SECRET CHAMBER.

The royal party that went to the steamer to see Nick Carter depart and to bid him Godspeed upon his journey, did not, of course, include the emperor in person.

Neither did it include Nick Carter in person, although with the exception of Chick, who had perfectly assumed the part, the world of Japan, which had been amazed at the interest manifested in an American by the Mikado, believed it did.

There were tears in Ten-Ichi's eyes as he wrung Chick's hand at the moment of parting, for Chick had not lost his bet of a red apple with the detective, and Ten-Ichi did not suspect the imposition.

To his credit, however, be it said, that the young Jap had seen very little of Chick during his stay in the United States.

There, too, upon the deck, close beside the supposed Nick, stood an American who appeared to be an old friend, and who had been recognized as such, and he, as the reader knows, was no other than our whilom acquaintance, Paul Lafont.

In the meantime, although Paul Lafont was sailing away from Japan in the guise of a tourist, another Paul Lafont appeared at the palace, even before the ship had sailed, and while his master, the marquis, was still at the wharf among the guests.

This Paul Lafont, whom we know was in reality Nick, went directly to the apartments of his master and busied himself there for some time, getting acquainted with the place, as he smilingly confessed to himself, and then, satisfied that he knew where to find things when the marquis should call for them, he made his way to the great court, from which point the ship could be seen as it slowly made its way out of the harbor.

As the detective suspected, the Mikado was there, watching through a glass the departing vessel, and Nick, who was now, it must be remembered, in the guise of a servant, approached humbly, dropping upon his knees and bowing his head until it touched against the stone flagging.

If the Mikado observed him, he made no sign for a long time, but Nick waited patiently, still with his head against the stones.

So, almost half an hour passed, and the detective began to realize that the flagging of that court was unusually tough, when at last the monarch turned.

"Approach," he said, shortly, in the Japanese tongue.

He was not in a good humor, for he had confidently expected to see a small boat depart from the side of the ship. He had begun to entertain fears that after all the detective would not return to him.

Nick crept forward nearer to the emperor, still with his head bowed.

"Well? You have a message for me. What is it?" the Mikado demanded.

"This, your majesty," and half raising himself, but still maintaining his position on his knees, Nick extended a folded note to the emperor's hand.

His majesty drew back, coldly.

"Deliver it to my secretary," he commanded, turning away.

"It is from Nick Carter, your majesty."

"Ah! I will take it. Wait where you are while I read."

Nick waited, and presently the Mikado turned to him again.

"Do you know the contents of this note?" he demanded.

"No, sire."

"You did not read it?"

"No, sire."

"And yet it was unsealed."

"I would have carried it all my life unread, sire," said Nick, with seeming humility.

"You have served Nick Carter in the past, this tells me."

"I have, your majesty."

"This message from him commends you to me."

"He told me that much, your majesty."

"Go to my private cabinet and await me there."

"Yes, sire."

"Stay!"

"Yes, sire."

"Did Nick Carter sail away in that ship?"

"It would appear so, your majesty."

"Do you know that he did not sail away?"

"Yes, sire. Another sailed in his place. The Nick Carter to whom your friends have bidden adieux—the Nick Carter to whom you said good-by two hours ago, was not the Nick Carter whom you received when he came here by the way of the private canal."

"Ha! You know that!"

"Yes, sire."

"But what you say is impossible."

"Yes, your majesty; but yet it is true."

"When will I see him again?"

"At midnight to-night, in the room he occupied while he was here."

"Ha! Then you do know the contents of this note."

"I know what he told me, sire."

"And what was that?"

"That you would have the rooms he occupied while here boarded up so that none but your majestic self could gain admittance by the single door that would remain, to which you would carry the key, and that if you would go there alone at midnight, you would find him awaiting you."

"That is all. Go, now. You need not wait for me as I bade you a moment ago."

"No, sire."

And so it happened that when, in accordance with the directions in the note, the Mikado entered the rooms where Nick had been accommodated in the palace, at twelve o'clock that night, he started back in dismay to discover that Nick Carter was indeed there before him, seated in the same chair and dressed in the same garb as when the emperor had last talked with him there.

Nick rose and extended his hand, smiling frankly.

"Sir," he said, "you see I have kept my word. Nick Carter has sailed away, and Nick Carter is here, at your service."

"I am amazed," exclaimed the emperor.

"In all the world, sir, only two persons know that I am in Japan. Those two persons are yourself and myself—oh, yes, there is one other, my assistant, Chick, who sailed away in my name and place."

"I am amazed," repeated the Mikado.

"Only ourselves in all Japan know that I am here. For the present, and until I give the word, only ourselves must know the truth."

"Not even Ten-Ichi?"

"No. Not even Ten-Ichi."

"The boy's heart is breaking for you, Mr. Carter."

"I will tell him all in good time, but at present even he must not know of my presence, for I have work for him to do which he can perform much better without that knowledge."

"Very well. But how comes it that you trusted that Frenchman with your message to me? I have more than once suspected him of being a spy."

"You did right to suspect him. He was a spy."

"Then——"

"But he is no longer a spy in Japan, for he is no longer in Japan."

"But he was here, that is, there in the court of the palace only an hour ago; I saw him there, from my window."

"You saw me, not the Frenchman. It was I who delivered the message to you this afternoon in the court."

"You!"

"Yes. I."

"Do you mean to assure me that you——" The Mikado paused, speechless.

"I have taken service with the Marquis of Hacco. I am Paul Lafont. Are you satisfied now, sir?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASSASSINATION PLOT.

The Mikado and his court had returned to Tokio.

The war clouds which had hovered so long over the destinies of Japan and Russia were lower and blacker and more threatening than they had ever been before.

Nick Carter had been a month in Japan, and during that time he had preserved the secret of his presence so that he was confident that the fact was known only to himself and the emperor.

The time had been occupied chiefly in keeping a close watch upon affairs and in making preparations for the crisis when it should appear.

And now, the detective was ready.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon of September 15, 1903, when the Marquis of Hacco detained Nick, who was in the act of leaving the apartment.

"Wait," he said, in French. "I have something to say to you."

Nick stood waiting, but did not reply in words.

"You have served me faithfully since you have been in my employ, Lafont," he said.

Nick bowed his acknowledgment of the compliment.

"The period of your probation is passed now," continued the marquis, and the detective, still waiting in an attitude of humility, began to wonder if there was not something concerning the relations between the marquis and Lafont which the latter had not told him.

"I am led to believe," the marquis went on after a moment's pause, "that even you were not made aware, when you were sent to me, of the full purpose of your employment here. In fact, Lafont, I do not know how much or how little your Third Section chose to tell you about my affairs, but whether it is much or little, the time has now come when we must understand each

other, for the time has arrived when we must act in unison."

Still the detective did not respond in words. He remained in the attitude of a respectful listener, waiting for the other man to commit himself further.

"Why don't you speak?" demanded the marquis, harshly.

"It is my duty to listen, not to offer suggestions to your highness," responded Nick.

The marquis rose and crossed to a window, and Nick could hear him mutter in Japanese something that sounded very much like an expression of anger that he was forced to put his life and his honor in the keeping of a menial; but, presently, he returned and seated himself again, evidently determined to "take the bit in his teeth," and to speak with entire frankness to his valet.

"Of course, I know that you are a Russian spy," he said, coldly. "I have known it ever since you came here with your letters of recommendation, just as you were aware that I was compelled to accept your services, whether I desired them or not."

"The claws of the Russian bear extend in all directions," ventured Nick, tentatively.

"Ay; that they do. What I want to know now is if you have all this time been equally aware of my attitude?"

"I know only that which you are pleased to tell me," retorted Nick, smiling with an expression that said quite plainly that as a matter of fact he knew much more.

"Bah!" exclaimed the marquis. "We waste words. You have received your orders concerning what you were to do here, when the time came to act. Are you ready to obey them?"

"I have been commended in the past for my ever readiness to obey orders," replied Nick. "It will be my constant effort to win commendation for the same attention to duty in the future."

"Am I to understand that you were told before you came here, what those orders might consist of? That is what I want to know."

"I am to take my orders from you, sir. That is the extent of my information," said Nick, boldly.

"You mean that it is all the reply you will make to my question. However, let that pass."

"As you please, sir."

The marquis bit his lips in vexation; plainly he was annoyed because his companion was so entirely noncommittal.

"I am not concerned," he said, coldly, "whether you save your own life or not, after the two deeds are accomplished, only to the extent that I know that if you escape, you will have no reason to betray me, while if you are captured and put to the torture, as you will be if you are taken, it is more than likely that your accusers will succeed in wringing the truth from you. Therefore, I wish to know if you have taken proper measures for your own safety."

"I shall escape. Never fear," said Nick, and the eyes of the marquis brightened.

"Good," he said.

The marquis was silent, and Nick began to fear that after all he was not to hear the details of the plot that had been referred to, so he ventured a question.

"When is it to be done, and how is it to be done?" he asked. "I believe that you were to acquaint me with the details."

"Haven't you completed your arrangements with Brolinski?"

"We do not discuss the affairs of our superiors," rejoined Nick.

"Bah! You are altogether too acute. However, I have gone so far now that there is no need to hesitate. The time fixed for the two deeds is during the last hours of the reception to-morrow night, at the house of the Princess Yaggahichi. I shall be at the reception but you will not attend me. The Marquis of Ito will be lured into the gardens, and, while he is engaged with two or three gentlemen, Brolinski will strike."

Nick's eyes brightened.

"I think I understand," he said. "Now will you tell me about the other?"

"The emperor will hold a conference with the Russian minister, here in the palace, which will not begin until late and which will extend until the time when Brolinski is to act."

"And that hour is fixed?" asked Nick.

"Bah! You know that it is. Yes. At half-past one in the morning. The appointment of the minister with the emperor, owing to the press of business, is not until midnight. At one, or soon after, he will take his leave. While he is there, you will be waiting outside the cabinet for the purpose of delivering to the emperor, as soon as he is at liberty, certain papers which I will give to you before I go. You will enter the

cabinet as soon as the minister leaves it. What happens after that is left to you. You have undertaken the task, and you must carry it out. If you strike before half-past one, you will endanger the success of the work that Brolinski has to do, and if he fails, only half of your duty will be accomplished. You know what that will mean to you better than I do. Of the two, Russia prefers that the Marquis of Ito should die. He is more dreaded by Russia than the Mikado himself. Now go. Come to me here at ten o'clock to-morrow night for the papers you are to take to the emperor at one. Until then, I do not want to see your face. I shall find a means of waiting upon myself. And, after that, I certainly wish never to see you again. Go."

"Lightning out of a clear sky," mused Nick, as he hurried away and sought the privacy of his own small room. "And to think that I have served that fellow for a month without his once saying or doing a thing to lead me to suspect him. Well, the whole truth of the matter is that he has done nothing. He has only waited, and, therefore, there has been nothing for me to suspect. Ah! marquis, this act of yours shows what Russian diplomacy can do in the way of spending money to a good purpose, and it has taken a price to purchase your help in this matter.

"Assassinate the emperor and the Marquis of Ito at the same moment, eh? What a stroke! Japan would be paralyzed! There would be no leader left worthy of the name. The whole world would stand appalled, but the powers would do nothing, and Russia would be triumphant. Before the scattered senses of the Japanese could be drilled back into form, Russian diplomacy would have crept into the inner circles of this empire, and—well, there would be no war; only a period of mourning and of inquiry and an end to Japanese ascendancy.

"And only in the way it has happened could I have hoped to discover the plot.

"If I had not discovered Lafont under the floor of my room; if I had not decided to impersonate him; nay, more, if Russia had not been informed of my coming, and thus forced me to pretend to leave here again, nothing would have betrayed this secret to me, and while I might have saved the Mikado, being near to him, nothing could have saved the Marquis of Ito.

"Now, they shall both be saved, Lafont shall actually disappear this time, and the Marquis of Hacco—I begin to think that I shall make him very useful after all. Fortunately he is a bachelor."

What relevancy this last remark had to the question at issue at that moment did not at once appear, but it evidently accorded well with the plans of the detective, for he smiled broadly as he made his way through the secret passage that communicated with a room where he was in the habit of conferring with the emperor.

What took place between them at that conference will never be known, but when Nick Carter came out he wended his way without hesitation to the rooms of his supposed master, the Marquis of Hacco, and entering, he closed and locked the door behind him.

The marquis was at that moment engaged in writing, and he looked up angrily as the detective entered.

"What brings you here again, and why have you dared to lock that door?" he demanded, leaping to his feet in alarm. "I told you that I did not want to see you again before to-morrow night."

"And yet I am here, and the door is locked," replied Nick, calmly.

"Then go! Go at once! I command you!"

But Nick did not obey. Instead he continued to advance so that by the time the marquis had given utterance to his command, the detective was within reach of him.

He desired, above all things, that the marquis should not have an opportunity to cry out, or to shout for assistance, and in that he succeeded.

Once within reach of the man, the rest was easy.

He started forward with a quick bound, seized the Japanese nobleman in his giantlike grasp, and at the same moment pressed his remaining hand over the marquis' mouth. Then, with more ease than he had expected, he bore the man to the floor, where, despite his struggles, he succeeded in thrusting and tying a handkerchief firmly in his mouth, thus successfully gagging him.

In another moment he had fastened handcuffs upon his wrists and ankles, and then rising and looking down upon his victim with a tantalizing smile, he said:

"Don't worry about your engagement for to-morrow night, my dear sir. The Marquis of Hacco will attend the reception at the house of the Princess Vaggahichi, but I think I can assure you that neither the emperor nor the Marquis of Ito will be assassinated."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ATTACK IN THE ORCHID HOUSE.

The house and the gardens of the Princess Yaggahichi were resplendent with lights and made beauti-

ful with decorations, and there the elite of Tokio had assembled on the evening of September 16.

The princess, herself, was a past mistress of the art of entertaining, and her receptions were eagerly sought by all who enjoyed the social distinction of being bidden there.

Nevertheless, the princess was not a native of the country. She was of European parentage, who, having married into a Japanese family of distinction and wealth, and since become a widow, now found the delights of her existence in that class of intrigue which is generally referred to collectively under the comprehensive name of diplomacy.

Her house was a favorite resort for all foreign statesmen. There they could meet and discuss weighty affairs in a semi-official manner which often accomplishes more than the best established customs can do; and there in particular were plots hatched and schemes planned which might ultimately end in the undoing of nations; which incur or avert war, or which might mean the success or the ruin of the dearest hopes of kings and emperors who have never set foot upon the Far East.

The night of September 16 was a memorable one.

There was, as there had been for months—almost for years—rumors of war in the air. History knows now that during the few weeks that preceded and followed that date, there had not been an hour when the general world would have been surprised to see Japan and Russia leap at each other's throats.

In reality, the time was as critical then, as it became later—even as near to a breach between the nations as it was during all the weeks of the ensuing month of December, when there was never a morning when the citizens of either country did not expect to wake to discover that war had been declared.

The air was surcharged with tension and expectation.

The slightest remark of a statesman was taken and multiplied into meaning which he had never once thought of giving to it, and even a smiling exchange of commonest courtesy between the Marquis Ito and the Russian ambassador was magnified into a state conference.

On this particular night the house was thronged.

Many were there because they desired to be present and to observe and study; but there were others, and many of them, who attended the reception because in reality they dared not, for the sake of policy, be absent.

The Marquis of Ito, one of the most observed of all men in the world at that time, as well as later, was naturally the focus for many eyes and thoughts, although to all outward appearance he was as care free as the most careless attendant at the function.

A notable absentee was the Russian ambassador, but as he was represented by one of his attaches, and the explanation had been made that he was detained by important affairs, whatever comments there were, were uttered in whispers.

At a quarter past one o'clock in the morning, when the enjoyment of the reception was at its height, a certain Count de Porthos, who had been well introduced into Tokio society, and was generally understood to be a Frenchman of distinction, approached the marquis, and after chatting a moment affably with him, asked if he had seen the Princess Yaggahichi's marvelous collection of orchids that had lately arrived.

The marquis admitted that he had not, and did so with a slight shrug of his shoulders that was intended to indicate that he also had no especial desire to view them.

The count, however, was insistent.

"Let me have the honor to conduct you to them," he said, and turning toward two gentlemen who were standing near, he added:

"The Marquis of Hacco and the Duke of Otero will accompany us, I am sure."

"Certainly," responded Hacco—and to all appearance he was the same Marquis of Hacco whom we already know—"I am sure that the duke has never seen the like of them. We will join you with pleasure."

Accordingly the four gentlemen moved away in the direction of the orchid house which was across the garden at the opposite side of the court.

As they moved away, anyone who had been engaged in noticing detail from a distance, could have seen that a fifth person also moved in that direction, although without joining the group and with the evident intention of avoiding notice if possible.

He was short and thickset. His face was crafty and cruel. His arms were unusually long compared with his other proportions, and his general bearing did not seem to fit his attire. In short, he looked like a ruffian who had by some mistake found himself attired in gentlemen's clothing and who had, therefore, intruded himself upon the society of gentlemen.

The four first mentioned, proceeding together, crossed the court and entered the orchid house, so that in a few moments from the time when the subject was first mentioned, they were all engaged in bending eagerly over the rare plants, admiring them.

Their backs were turned toward the entrance to the orchid house, so that they had no means of seeing the form of the fifth man who glided noiselessly into the place behind them, and having cast a furtive glance around him, crept stealthily forward, with every second approaching nearer and nearer to the group.

Presently he halted for an instant, and, passing behind a convenient screen of foliage, he looked at his watch, nodded his head in evident satisfaction, replaced it in his pocket, and then deliberately drew a long and murderous-looking knife from its place of concealment beneath his coat.

The fifth man was the Russian spy, Bolinski.

The time indicated on his watch when he glanced at the dial, was twenty-seven minutes past one o'clock.

The hour set for the assassination of the Marquis Ito had arrived, and the assassin was prepared to fulfill the terms of his contract.

There was no longer any hesitation in his movements.

Measuring the distance that intervened between him and his appointed victim, he started forward rapidly and noiselessly, with the knife half raised in his hand, ready to strike.

Nearer and nearer he crept, his eyes blazing with the thirst for blood suddenly about to be gratified, for your practiced assassin like the confirmed toper, has only to see the object of his desires within reach, to seize upon it as eagerly as the hungry tiger leaps for its prey.

Evidently, too, he was sure of his opportunity, and secure in his belief that he would be given opportunity to escape, for he gave only one quick glance behind him to observe if he could be seen from behind, and apparently never a thought to the three men who were in the company of the man he intended to stab with the knife.

He was sure of the Marquis Hacco, and probably equally sure of the Duke of Otero and the Count de Porthos.

It was a singular bit of forgetfulness on the part of the great Marquis Ito to permit himself to be led away alone in company with two foreigners at such a critical time in the affairs of Japan; and yet, was not also Marquis Hacco, the Mikado's friend, of the company?

Bolinski moved with the silent tread of a cat until he was almost within striking distance, and then he leaped forward.

But as he leaped, a most surprising thing happened.

Marquis Hacco had been bending above an orchid, evidently studying it with great care, but in reality his eyes had been fixed upon a small, circular mirror that he held in the palm of his hand, and in the depths of that mirror he had seen and followed every move made by Bolinski.

When the assassin raised his weapon in the air and made the leap, the marquis—or have you already guessed that Hacco was none other than Nick Carter, playing the part?—turned like lightning and faced him.

The hand of the assassin that held the weapon was knocked upward, and the right fist of the detective shot forward with the force of a pile driver.

The blow caught Bolinski exactly on the point of his chin, and heavy as the man was, he leaped from the floor as if he had been propelled by a spring placed under him, and when his body struck the ground, his head was the first to touch it, and he laid there, trembling and quivering like a stricken bullock.

Nick knew before the blow landed that Bolinski would be knocked out, and he had also planned exactly what he was to do next, for the instant the blow landed, and before one of the party had an opportunity to cry out, he stepped back and raised both hands, and in each one it could be seen that he held a revolver, the muzzles of which were covering, respectively, the hearts of the duke and the count.

"Hush!" he commanded, sharply. "No noise! The danger is past. Marquis Ito, be good enough to step to my side. You, De Porthos, and you, Otero, will remain where you are, and if either of you utter a sound, I will kill you where you stand.

"Really, my dear marquis," said Ito, smiling, and apparently as cool as he would have been under any other circumstances, but, nevertheless, complying instantly with Nick's request, "this was most unexpected. Will you tell me why you threaten these gentlemen?"

Porthos smiled and showed his white teeth. Otero was visibly alarmed, but both stood their ground.

"Yes," demanded Porthos. "Why do you threaten us, marquis? Has the sudden appearance of an assassin made you mad?"

"Quite mad," responded Nick, dryly, "but not ex-

actly in the way you mean. If you place any value upon your lives, stand where you are, for if you make the slightest attempt to escape, I shall shoot. I have not foiled one assassin, but three, as you well know."

Without waiting for a reply to his remark, he uttered a low whistle, and instantly a door opened at the far end of the orchid house, and an officer and three soldiers of the Imperial Guard entered.

They came forward calmly, and as they drew nearer, Count Porthos turned white to the lips. For a moment it seemed as if he was casting about him for a means of escape, but the eyes of Nick Carter were fastened upon him, and he did not move until the hands of the guard seized upon him. Then, indeed, he undertook to struggle, but in an instant he as well as his companions were whirled about in their tracks, and almost before they understood what was happening, they were half dragged, half pushed by their captors, from the orchid house, and the door was closed behind them.

The Marquis Ito and Nick Carter stood alone over the senseless body of the assassin.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE NEST OF THE CONSPIRATORS.

"You are not Hacco," said the Marquis Ito, calmly.

"No," replied Nick. "I am not."

"Well," smiling, "it does not so much matter who you are since I am indebted to your presence here for my life. And this fellow?"—spurning the senseless body of Bolinski with his foot—"who is he?"

"A man who was hired to kill you."

"He nearly succeeded in doing it, too. What is to be done with him?"

"We will call assistance from the house in a moment, and have him taken away. There is no possibility for his regaining consciousness for a quarter of an hour yet."

"I should think not—ever—judging from the force of the blow he received. Well, what have you to say in the meantime? For I see that you have something to say to me."

"I have merely to convey to you the commands of your emperor, sir."

"Good. I expected that, since I saw that a part of the Imperial Guard was at hand."

"The conspiracy, of which this attempted assassination of yourself was a part, included the sacred person of the emperor himself."

"I can well imagine it, sir. Proceed."

"He was to have been stabbed while in his private cabinet, at the same moment you were to be struck down here."

"Pardon me for interrupting, but I trust that the plot was not permitted to approach so nearly to a consummation in his case as in mine."

"No, sir, it was not. Danger has not been near him for a moment."

"I am glad to know that. And now, for his commands."

"We are to give the impression that Count Porthos and the Duke of Otero were called away before we entered the orchid house; that this fellow attacked you from behind, but was fortunately discovered in time by your companion, Marquis Hacco. We did give him up, regularly, to the police. As for the others——"

The marquis rubbed his hands together and smiled.

"As for the others," he said, slowly, "so far as we are concerned they have ceased to exist at all. Is that it?"

"Yes, sir, that is the idea, as the emperor wishes it."

"A wise arrangement, as it does away with the suggestion of a plot. Such rumors are disquieting. Are we indebted to your own wise councils for these suggestions?"

"Partly."

"And now, may I ask who you are, why you are masquerading in the guise of Marquis Hacco, why it is the wish of the emperor that I recognize you as the real marquis, and where Marquis Hacco is at this moment?"

"Certainly. For the first question, I am Nick Carter, whom you have entertained at dinner at your residence."

"But——"

"I did not leave Japan as was supposed. It was the emperor's wish that I remain here, and here I am."

"Greatly to my own good fortune, sir. And the other questions?"

"I will reply to them by making a single statement. I happened to discover that Marquis Hacco plotted against the lives of his emperor and minister—the Mikado, and Ito. Part of that plot consisted in his drawing you into this place to-night so that Brolinski could kill you. In order to capture Brolinski, it was necessary that the plot be continued to the length it did, and, to do that, I was forced to personate the mar-

quis. The emperor has decided that for reasons of state it will be well for me to continue the impersonation."

"I agree with him—quite."

"And as for the real marquis, we are directed for the present to forget also that he exists."

"Quite so. Quite so."

"And now, sir, if you will be good enough to return to the house while I keep watch over this fellow, who will soon revive, and if you will summon the police and send them here, we can rejoin the others, and presently take our leave without undue excitement and comment. Assassins are not such uncommon beasts that this incident need necessarily be regarded in the light of an affair of state. Rather let the world attribute it all to the act of a madman."

Marquis Ito hurried away, and as soon as he was gone Nick tore open the coat and waistcoat that Bolinski wore.

With deft hands he searched every possible hiding place in the man's clothing, and succeeded so well that when he straightened up again a package of papers, that was incased in thin, oiled silk, was transferred from the pockets of the assassin to his own.

During this time he believed himself to be unobserved, but in that he was mistaken, for even while he was bending over the body of the prostrate man, a dark form stole out from the shrubbery some distance away and crept forward toward him.

Had the detective been a man of slow motions, he must have met the fate that had been intended for the minister, for the man in the shrubbery also held a gleaming weapon in his hand, and there was no doubt that he intended to use it. But ere he could advance sufficiently near, the detective had completed his search, and, rising, changed his posture so that the shadow-like figure slunk back again into concealment.

It was evident that he had not the stomach to attack Nick Carter unless he could take him unawares and from behind, when he would have no chance of escape or defense. But he remained undiscovered, and hence he had lost only one opportunity.

Doubtless he believed that he could wait for others.

It was not long before the officers, sent at the request of Marquis Ito, arrived upon the scene, and they were followed by a throng of frightened guests who had been told of the incident; but they remained at a respectful distance while the would-be assassin was bound and borne away.

To all the questions that were thrust at him, Nick merely shrugged his shoulders and pointed at Bolinski, as if to say: "That is your answer."

Aloud he said to one inquirer:

"It is nothing. Merely the act of a crank who had some fancied wrong to redress. No harm was done. The marquis is safe. The assassin is beyond doing any injury. Let us forget all about it. Such is Ito's wish."

"But were you alone with the Marquis Ito, when this man attacked him?" asked the princess, who had joined the group.

Nick turned and fixed his searching eyes upon her as he replied:

"Quite alone, princess."

"But, my dear Hacco, I saw Count de Porthos and the Duke of Otero come this way with you. Where are they?"

"Really, madam, I could not say. We parted from them. They were called away, I think. Ito and I came here together. The assassin attacked us. That is all."

Watching her furtively, Nick could see that she was disturbed, and from that instant he became satisfied that she was concerned in the plot.

"You need watching, my intriguing princess," was his thought, "and you shall be watched. Unless I am greatly mistaken you will go to keep your friends company in their dungeon domicile before many days have passed."

As he turned away from the princess, he found himself face to face with Ten-Ichi, and as the lad was on the point of withdrawing, he put out one hand and detained him.

Drawing him to one side, he said, still imitating the marquis:

"How does it happen that you are here, Ten-Ichi?"

"My father sent me."

"For what purpose?"

"To watch that no harm came to the Marquis of Hacco."

"Indeed. And have you watched well?"

"So well that I entered the door yonder before the officers, sent by Ito to your assistance, arrived."

"Well?"

"So well that in arriving on the scene thus early I saw not only that you recovered some papers from the pocket of the assassin, but also that there was still another person here at that time. He was creeping toward you to stab you when you rose and changed your position, so that he was compelled to slink again into hiding."

"And suppose he had succeeded in approaching nearer without my discovering him?"

"I would have shot him."

"Exactly. And why did you not shoot him as it was? Or, at least, attempt to capture him?"

"Because he did not see me, although I saw him. I will be able to find him later. Here there would have been a fuss about it, and explanations would have been necessary. Later, I can secure him without them."

"Wise Ten-Ichi. I see, my boy"—changing into English—"that you know me at last."

"Yes; oh, yes. Thank you for permitting me to admit it."

"Your father told you when he sent you here tonight? I had given him permission to do so tomorrow."

"Yes; but I should have recognized you, anyway."

"You would? How?"

"When you turned your eyes upon the princess. Only your own eyes can hold that expression. If I had not been watching you, already knowing who you were, I might not have noticed it. As it is, I think I should have known the truth then."

"We will leave here at once, Ten-Ichi, and return to the palace. In the morning we will come here again."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I think I understand."

"Listen, Ten-Ichi, the Princess Yaggahichi is the brains of all this plotting. Nine times out of ten, in affairs of this kind, you can look to a clever woman for the source of supplies in intrigue. We have her frightened already by the sudden disappearance of two of her constituents. She is still more frightened at the failure of the plot and at my apparent indifference, for she does not doubt that I am Hacco. She will give me some command to come to her to-morrow, and come I will. When I am here and she has betrayed herself, she shall be made to talk to a purpose, and that purpose will be to save your father's empire."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONSPIRATORS OF TOKIO.

It was high noon when Nick Carter, still in his disguise as Marquis Hacco, and accompanied by Ten-Ichi, presented himself at the house of the Princess Yaggahichi, for the detective had not been mistaken in supposing that before his departure from the reception, she would signify a desire to see him again as soon as possible.

Her summons had consisted only of a whispered sentence in Russian, in which she had said: "Come to me here, at noon," and a smile and nod; but they were sufficient, and Nick knew that the personnel of the conspiracy which had accomplished so much to the detriment of the Japanese diplomatic service, would soon be known to him.

He had a double purpose in taking Ten-Ichi with him, but what they were will be discovered as they appear.

The princess received them in her morning sun parlor, and she could not repress a glance of annoyance at the supposed marquis when she discovered that he was accompanied by a son of the emperor. Nevertheless, she smiled graciously as she bade them be seated.

But Ten-Ichi had already received his instructions from the detective, and accordingly he declined the proffered chair.

"I came merely to pay my respects and for the pleas-

ure of accompanying Hacco," he said. "If you will excuse me, I will not remain."

He left them, then, it is true, but it is also true that he did not go away from the house.

As soon as he had departed, the princess, without waiting for Nick Carter to speak, at once plunged into the reasons for their meeting.

"Tell me," she said, rapidly, "what in the world happened to so disarrange our plans; and where are De Porthos and Otero?"

"In prison," replied Nick, affecting to speak in dejection. "We had no sooner entered the orchid house than we were set upon by members of the Imperial Guard, Otero and De Porthos were carried away to prison, and Bolinski—well, you already know what happened to him."

"But how did you escape? Since the others were attacked, why not you also?"

"That I do not know. Either I was not betrayed with the others, or Ito spared me in order to warn me."

"You have heard nothing since?"

"No."

"And what did Ito do when you were attacked?"

"Nothing. He stood by, looked on, and smiled; nothing more."

"Ah! He is a great man! Would that he were on our side. Do you know that several of our friends came to me after the others had taken their departure. They felt that it was necessary to alter our plans. The attacks that we so carefully planned against Gen. Yamagata, Count Inouye, Gen. Fukushima, and the minister's brother, Admiral Ito, had to be abandoned. Different arrangements must be made. Their assassinations cannot take place to-day as we hoped."

"When, then?" asked Nick.

"Who can say?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders. "Perhaps to-morrow; perhaps never. I am terrified. Even now perhaps our own heads are in danger. But——"

"Well—but what?"

"The others who are expected will be here at two o'clock. We can determine it all at that time."

"Who will come?"

"All. The five, besides ourselves and the two who are now in prison. Ah! Hacco, I am terrified. If such a thing had been possible, I would have fled the country as soon as my guests departed."

"I see that you have been making preparations," said Nick, glancing around the room and permitting his eyes to rest lingeringly upon a massive desk that stood in one corner of it.

She followed his gaze, and smiled.

"I have not slept," she said. "A dozen times I have opened my desk, and begun to remove those incriminating papers from it in order to burn them, and as many times I have replaced them, determined that I would wait till after the meeting at two o'clock. Many of those documents are in your own handwriting, as you know, Hacco."

"As I know only too well," admitted Nick.

"Shall we destroy them now?" the princess asked, eagerly.

"No. Better wait till our friends arrive. There can be no danger till then, surely."

"As you will; but I have not told you all the danger that threatens us, Hacco."

"No? What more is there?"

"That American detective—Nick Carter, they call him—did not sail away when he was supposed to do so. He is still here; he is in Tokio."

"How do you know that?"

"Bah! You know it yourself, and you thought you would keep the intelligence from me so that I would not give way to fright. Yeddoshino, my house messenger, saw you when you took the papers from the body of Brolinski so that the officers would not find them. He, moreover, heard you while you talked with the minister, although he could catch only a part of what you said, for you changed your talk into a language that he did not understand. But he did hear you mention Nick Carter."

"Well?"

"Then you do know that he is here?"

"Yes, princess, I do know that he is here," said Nick, calmly, and in his own natural voice. "The

reason why I know it so well," he continued, when she uttered a little cry of alarm and started from her chair, "is because I am Nick Carter, myself, and not Marquis Hacco, as you suppose."

"You? You?" exclaimed the princess, wildly, and she laughed shrilly, starting back and pointing her finger at him. "Now I understand. Now I know why our plans have miscarried. Now it is all explained. But, my dear Monsieur Carter, for once you have gone a little too far in your revelations, for——"

She broke into another wild laugh, and at the same instant something fell over Nick's head, and a heavy weight landed upon his shoulders, which bore him to the floor. Nor could he struggle to free himself when he was down, for the thing that had been thrown over his head was a Japanese net of the finest and strongest silk, and it rendered him utterly and entirely helpless.

He was borne to the floor by the weight of two men who had thrown themselves upon him, and he instantly realized how useless it was for him to attempt to free himself from the meshes of the net, which effectually prevented him from exerting his great strength.

"There are dungeons elsewhere than in the Kayto Palace," said the smiling princess, looking down upon him. "Our friends shall determine what will be done with you, when they arrive, and at least you may know that if we have to pay the penalty for conspiring, we will be revenged upon you before we go to death."

Then another thing happened, quite as unexpected to the others as the netting episode had been to Nick.

There were two quick sounds, as if the wall of the house had been struck with the blunt end of a hammer, and Yedoshino and his companion, who had attacked Nick, fell to the floor like dead men. At the same instant Ten-Ichi stepped into the room and paused with his right arm raised. In his hand he held a small instrument of the shape of a dumbbell and about three inches in length.

"Princess," he said, coldly, "unless you wish to be stricken senseless like those men there, get upon your knees and hold out your hands while my servant binds them."

As she complied, Ten-Ichi turned his attention to Nick, and the netting was soon cut away.

But even as he rose to his feet, there was a rush of approaching men, and the next instant it seemed as if the entire household, at the command of the princess, rushed into the room.

In reality there were six in the attacking party, all foreigners, and all followers of the fortunes of the princess.

Doubtless they believed that six men could easily conquer Nick Carter and Ten-Ichi, but they were doomed to miserable disappointment.

They had barely passed the doorway when Nick leaped to meet them.

The first one went down from a blow of Nick's fist that would have felled an ox; the second was seized, raised in the air as if he were a child, and hurled bodily against three of the others, and while Nick leaped still farther forward and again knocked them, one after another to the floor, senseless, as they attempted to rise to renew the attack, the sixth and last of the party threw himself upon Ten-Ichi.

But there, too, he had reckoned without his host, for Ten-Ichi met him more than halfway, ducked and caught the right arm of the fellow in the Shamurai twist, and with one quick motion, broke the bone between the elbow and the wrist.

"Well, Ten-Ichi," said Nick, looking around him, "we seem to be doing business to-day. This sort of thing is good for the circulation. I needed it in my business."

"What shall we do next, chief?" asked Ten-Ichi, in English.

"Tie them up and gag them, with pieces of this netting. After that we will dispose of them where they won't be seen, and then we will await the arrival of the friends of the princess who were to arrive at two o'clock. I don't think we need send for assistance. We can do the job alone, eh, Ten-Ichi?"

"You bet!" said Ten-Ichi, quite like an American.

"Good. Bear a hand."

In a surprisingly short space of time the captured

men, some of whom were recovering their senses by this time, were bound and gagged and deposited in the retiring room which adjoined the one in which the fight took place.

The princess was also seated in a chair among them, with her hands tied behind her back, and Ten-Ichi's servant was bidden to stand over her and prevent her from warning the others who might approach.

"Now, my lad," said Nick, "our expected friends will come singly, of course. They would scarcely dare to make their approach together after the fright of last night. Do you step outside and be prepared to warn me of the approach of any of them, while I amuse myself by an inspection of the contents of this desk. When you see one of the men approaching, let me know, and leave him entirely to me. There is netting enough left for all of them, I think."

"But you may need my help, here."

"Oh, no. They will think that I am their fellow-conspirator, Hacco. Leave them to me. I will have no trouble with them. There are only five, and they will come one by one."

Ten-Ichi grinned.

"It all reminds me of one of your American sayings," he said.

"What is that, son?"

"'Come into my garden, said the spider to the fly.'"

"They will come all right," replied Nick, "and they will find that the web is mighty sticky, too. They won't get out of it. And, Ten-Ichi, with the information that is in this desk, we will have rounded up and captured every spy in Tokio—ay, in Japan, before the sun goes down."

"The Mikado will never forget you," remarked Ten-Ichi.

"One thing more," said Nick, as the lad was leaving the room.

"Yes, sir?"

"As soon as the fifth of our expected guests has arrived, I would like you to hurry to the offices of Marquis Ito and bring him here without delay. Do not tell him what to expect, but say that Nick Carter asks him to come here as a favor, and for reasons of state."

"I will do so. He will come."

"Good."

* * * * * * *

Two hours later, when Marquis Ito entered the room, he halted in surprise, as well he might.

Arranged in chairs against the wall, firmly tied in their chairs, were the eleven men who had been captured in the house, and in another chair, slightly in advance of the others, was Princess Yaggahichi, coldly defiant.

Five of the eleven men were prominent members of Tokio society; men who were on familiar terms with Ito, himself, but to the credit of Japan be it said, not one of them was a native Japanese.

While the marquis was regarding them, coldly, Nick stepped forward and placed a bundle of papers in his hand.

"Sir," he said, "here are the Conspirators of Tokio, and here, among these papers, you will find a full account of their doings for the past year, a complete outline of their plans for the future, and a list of the names of every person in the country who is at all concerned in their machinations.

"Not only was the emperor and yourself to be assassinated," continued Nick, "but your brother, the admiral, Generals Yamagata and Fukushima, Count Inouye and others were named for sacrifice."

"You have done the blessed and sacred Mikado a very great service, Mr. Carter," said the minister, "and you will not be forgotten. For myself, and for all Japan, I thank you."

THE END.

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